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# The Cells Within



thriller

dark

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## Chapter 1 by Rainyday

I was never a believer. I am a soldier not a f\*ing crusader. Some of my men are of various faiths. One of my men wears a trinket made of the likeness of the bloody, mangled body of his Gods only child hanging from an Ancient Roman torture device, it's made of solid gold. I thought I had seen too much hell here on Earth during the last 3 tours of active duty to worry about some place we go supposedly after we die.

Two weeks ago we were sent on what sounded to be a mild, What we call a "vegetarian" mission. 'Vegetarian' meaning there was to be no weapons or violent force necessary, no killing expected. I don't remember a lot between then and waking in this quarantine military hospital. Not one man on my team can say how we got there but we remember a woman beautiful, seductive and something tells me very wicked...

Upon waking here we all speak of the same dream. A terrible nightmare we all can describe down to the tiniest detail. I feel so naked and vulnerable somehow. I think I may have gone mad.

Our time in this hospital has been spent running from sleep with a desperation I have only seen

in guilty men about to die, the desperation of a man scared of being sent to hell. We drink thick black coffee by the liters and one of my men is bringing him some prescription stimulants, and he says he will drink himself to death, there won't be enough.

Sleep deprivation has caused some of my men to crack and upon their nervous breakdowns have been strapped to their beds, threatened with a section 8 before being given

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'something to help them sleep.'

Our weapons have been taken along with our uniforms... and from some of the men, their sanity as well. It's not like they tried to take it, it was just kind of like the sock that comes off with the shoe, those men's grip on reality stretched too far had lost the elasticity of their minds and it slid right off with their guns and fatigues. I hold on to my sanity with the grip of a pit bulls jaws struggling with reality and logic. The little man who sits on my right shoulder, who I have relied on to keep me alive throughout countless perilous missions, tells me there is no way the sinister visions we describe can be real. He has yet to answer the smaller fellow on my left why then the entire squad describes identical visions upon visiting the land of slumber.

The staff doesn't listen to any of us, they seem to have no care to. The scene, events, people are all the same in every one of our dreams. Even the putrid smell that leaves a sour taste in our mouths when we wake up. A dark hot crumbling city in the desert among sand and broken rocks. The area we dream of is a place none of us can recall being before. Though very similar to other places we visited on our recent tour, the events that unfold there are so very different than anything we had ever seen. It is a place not one of us will soon forget.

It is my duty to stay in control for my men, so I try my hardest to hide the tremor in my hands, I keep my soldier face on and fruitlessly try to find answers. I fear I am not the only one of my squad contemplating death over sleep. God help us we need rest.

## Chapter 2 by Sarah May Vigue-Cortez



I am playing cards with a couple of my men. We must have looked like a zombie poker game to anybody watching us. Our eyes large and round from the coffee, sunken deep inside dark grey pits. Pale skin from lack of sunlight and most of us had contusions and even some open wounds stitched closed that we don't remember getting. Some of us on our third day of no sleep no one less than 24 hours. So our conversation was little to say the least and we mostly communicated by grunts and gestures with our hands.

*Damn I have got great luck tonight would that I could go to Vegas* I thought to myself with a sigh *Alas Vegas is in another world nearly 9,000 miles away. Mmmm what's that smell* I sniffed at the air. *It smells like, like a sweet musky kind of fruit, or flower and burning incense.* I looked up from

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flicked her head with a laugh bringing her hair back to cover the tattoo. *Damn look at that ass.* I thought getting a bit excited I have got to see this girls face Just as though she heard me she turned around showing interest in our game. *D-yam she is smokin!* Full pouty lips stained deep red, dark amber skin, and her eyes.. Those eyes were dramatic and intense. So black you could not tell a difference between pupil and iris. Her hair A deep auburn and her blood red dress hung limply off of her ample cleavage. Those perfect red lips pursed then took shape of a half smile. making her appear mischievous and very sexual, I couldn't help but noticing.

*Oh God she is looking right at me* I thought. *Did she say something? I wasn't paying attention* I squirmed uncomfortably in my hard plastic chair. She winked, still looking at me and then sensually made the come here motion with her index finger as she turned and swayed away from our table. I stand up a bit dizzy and follow behind her. She turns to look behind her to see if I'm still following with a smile and cocked eyebrow. She is walking towards the entrance corridor neither my men nor I have walked passed that point during our stay here. She see's I have stopped pursuing her. She turns and looks quizzically at me and cocks her head with a look of a young girl confused and hurt. "Why the hesitation?" the look seemed to say.

*How can I say no to that face?* I start walking again. She smiles knowingly, walks a bit further in to the corridor until out of sight of the TV room we were just in. She leans against the wall with her back arched sticking her breast out, nipples visibly perky under the red fabric. *She want's me to touch her* I thought excitedly. Certainly not wanting to disappoint her I moved in, hungrily I kissed her neck. *Mmm tastes like honey.* Her body was hot to the touch, sweet skin smooth as silk. Excitement was overwhelming me as she pressed her body to mine inviting me. I passionately moved my mouth down her neck across her chest then pressed my lips to her sweet breast above the neckline of her dress. My hands eagerly exploring the voluptuous curves of her hips and ass. She ran her fingers through my hair then down my back until she found the bottom of my shirt pulling my shirt up while raking her fingernails up across my bare skin.

*Gotta cool down before I lose it too early* I thought. Breathing heavily I pulled my mouth from

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Oh god I think my face is on fire. Getting desperate for air I opened my eyes....

### Chapter 3 by Stan Johnson



That's when it happens.

The hospital: gone. My men: gone. Anything familiar: gone. And in its place, corpses of buildings help upright by the undeath of rebar and fragmented concrete. My nose recoils from my first breath, and when I see a pile across the street to my right, I know why.

The bones in that pile aren't completely bare yet.

I stumble backwards, instantly recognizing this place. "No," I mutter. "No, no, no, NO!"

Then I'm running--I don't care where, so long as it gets me back to consciousness and familiarity. Yet each stride I take demands all my effort, as if some unseen deity has a casual, almighty hold on me and is allowing me to inch forward for its own amusement. Whatever it is that holds me, it makes it impossible to escape her.

She's beside me, now, walking easily, examining me with those eyes I can't afford to look at but nearly can't resist losing myself in. I've been all over the world, as a soldier--the whole "girl in every port" thing--and I know how to keep it together when the demands of the mission outweigh the scream of biology. It's not as hard as people make it out to be.

Yet, here, now, biology is all I care about. I begin to slacken my stride, my arms begin to come up. I see her smile, and I feel everything I felt in that corridor in the hospital.

No!

The word whips through my brain, snapping my lust and forcing me to blink. I hadn't said that. So who had?

The woman frowns, quizically, and pulls one dress strap off her shoulder in an unmistakable

gesture. Faint images appear in the sky behind her, and even as I begin to lose myself to her gaze again I still somehow manage to see her. See more of Story Wars

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public, to put it politely.

My ears catch whispers on the wind; weeping, moaning, muttering. One image shows a man lying on his face, weakly pounding the ground with a fist. I can hear--almost feel--his saying, "She got what she wanted from me, didn't she? Didn't she? Why couldn't I stop?"

The woman moves in, placing her face just a breath from mine. My mind screams as she forces a kiss on me, no matter how delicious it is. Somewhere in the back of my mind I recall something about a forbidden fruit, and wonder if maybe the religionists got something right after all.

"It was Eve that gave it to man," I manage to say.

The woman hisses and leaps back instantly. Before I could even register the strike, her talons have raked gouges in my face. The pain doesn't start for several seconds, but when it does, I find myself grateful: it arouses my consciousness and self control.

The strange world begins to fade around me, and the woman's look of rage morphs to bewilderment, then fear, then back to rage as she leaps for me. Her claws grip my bicep, but the pain only shoves me further back into the real world--my world.

As my sight goes dark, I see two, final images: a world left in utter ruin, and the image of a young woman kneeling over a man's corpse and weeping. It's that woman, only with an innocence I can't conceive of her ever having.

I jolt upright, and find myself spasming on the floor, blabbering, with spittle dripping from my mouth.

"Sarge? Sergeant Meeks? Sir?" It's far more than he's said in days. I take that as a bad sign.

It's corporal Davis, the team medic. I've never seen that kind of worry in his eyes, and we've run missions gave him chances to hold intestines for his buddies.

I squeeze my eyes shut and try to shake my head clear. Lingerin' trails of fire run along my face, and my left arm feels as though someone's been hammerin' spikes into them. Yet, when I look, there's nothing so much as a faint red dot.

"I'm fine, Corporal," I say, already feeling my head throb with the remembrance of a wound. "Gotta make the coffee stronger, I think." I force a chuckle, trying desperately to lighten the mood and

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to get Davis to quit looking at me like that. I glance around to find that the rest of my men share his same expression.

Davis peers at me in a way that gives me every reason not to ask why. He doesn't even crack a half smile. "Sarge?"

I grunt.

"Who," and he shudders, "who's.... Lilith?"

My gut knots itself. I have no idea what he's talking about, but I know I should.

"Come again?"

"Lilith, Sir," he says, barely able to get the name out. "You kept repeating that name as soon as you dropped into that grand mal seizure you just had. We thought you were just bluffing against a bad hand for a sec, but..."

My throat goes dry, and a flash of that woman's face fills my mind. I can't help but want her again, as much the thought both disgusts and terrifies me.

"I'm fine, Davis." I haul myself up into my chair. "I guess that blows my straight flush." I throw my cards on the table, and gesture for another hand. I don't want to tell him--or any of my men--that I know exactly who Lilith is. I don't want to tell them that during those moments she controlled me, I knew exactly what she wanted, and that she didn't care who she got it from.

I didn't want to tell them that--without knowing how I knew--our lives had all been forfeit to her desires to spend us until we were empty husks, before finding other victims to fuel her desperate journey. All we were, to her, were easy sources of the kind of cells only men can produce.

And she wanted all the cells she could get.

Chapter 4 by Stan Johnson

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Forty-eight hours goes by. I haven't seen the woman. I don't want to say the name "Lilith" aloud--since that morning

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if my men have suffered seizures like mine, but only two of them came out of it

I'll miss Davis. He was found face down on his bunk, half-undressed and foaming at the mouth, just yesterday afternoon. I wish I hadn't seen that look on his face.

The men who made it back to us were even quieter than they had been, if that were possible, and the look in their eyes made it clear they'd been drawn in by her as well. I knew better than to ask them how they escaped. I knew better to ask them about anything.

When Davis was rendered a spent shell by Lilith, I knew we really didn't have a choice. She was taking us at random and against our wills; it was anyone's guess as to how long we had before we all ended up like our late medic, and the half of my men who still had any sort of sanity were on their knees more than they were on their feet, now. Whether their god would help them, I didn't know. For me, there's no god quite like a good .50 cal. Yet, somehow, I knew that wasn't enough. I had no choice. I called the men together, ready to drive the knife deep with my SITREP.

"Men," I said, after I'd laid it all out, "I think we all know what needs to be done." They didn't even nod. The best thing about being black ops is you make a plan without saying much, and without giving any one man enough information to compromise the whole op if he gets bagged. Besides, there wasn't much to plan: if she came for you, you'd do whatever you could alert your buddies before she took you away, then you'd do your absolute best to take her out. It all went down with little more than grunts and gestures, and I knew they understood it.

A few wept openly, but most gave me stares fitting for the kind of group we were. We had no idea how we were going to do it, but we'd take the fight to that woman, and give our lives to protect mankind--literally mankind--from ever falling prey to her again.

And we all knew we'd die trying.

We all got the chance to prove it later that night.

## Chapter 5 by Stan Johnson



Rodriguez went in first. More accurately, he was pulled in by Lilith. We did our best to avoid watching him—ecstasy should not be a part of the mission. We tried to relax ourselves into a sleep, but none of them wanted. The only way to survive was to stay alert. The only way to help was to help.

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If you consider it "helpful" to be sent into the belly of the inferno,

I'm not sure what was different, this time. Maybe it was that we all chose to sleep. Either way, when I found myself astride a pile of rubble and...sundries...my squad was all with me.

I gestured, and they formed up instantly. I pitched my voice low, and crouched, never taking my eyes off what was around me. "Search the rubble for anything that might make a weapon." They complied wordlessly, and we moved out as silently as we could for picking our way over shattered bricks and splintered stud walls.

My boys were jumpy, twitching at any sound, white-knuckling their makeshift weapons. Lilith had never announced herself before arrival, and I knew—in the way you can only know in dreams—that she'd simply appeared in front of every one of us.

"She hates the Adam and Eve story," I whispered, recalling my last encounter. Mentioning the old fable had earned me a nasty wound, but it had kept me safe from a repeat of the first time we'd met. I shuddered at the recollection of how recklessly out of control I'd been; and again at how much I'd savored it.

"What's Sunday School got to do with a sex-crazed demon chick, Sarge?" They still let them call me that, even though I made Captain three years back.

"Just keep that info in your pocket in case of encounter," I muttered. "Mentioned it last time I saw her. She cut me up pretty good, but I kept my pants."

My men nodded silently, and we carried on with our unspoken plan. Honestly, we had nothing to go on. Stay together, then gang up on her the moment she appeared. I had no idea whether it would work, but we had nothing better. How do you kill a dream? Oh, yeah. You give someone a Government job. My mouth twitched at the corner. I guess humor is just another defense mechanism when everything goes into the toilet.

"Contac—"

Victor cut off with a gurgling scream. Muscle memory took over. Rebar, broken glass, half-

busted bricks all came to bear on the most luscious woman imaginable, terror and rage driving us hard enough to kill a bear.

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She doesn't even do us the



I don't even remember how the rest of them went down, but she had me on my back before I could even think, without a scratch on her. What happened after that was a blur, but when I could finally think straight, I was being pulled down an alley at full tilt, barely able to stay on my feet. A man—the kind you only see in war movies—had a gator's grip on my forearm, and leapt debris like a kid jumps an ant hill. I swore he was going to dislocate my shoulder, but somehow, he didn't.

The fact that a guy the size of Schwarzenegger was running from Lilith made me relieve myself. It was one thing to see my men—no slouches themselves—get mauled in an ambush. This guy, though... he seemed to know what was up.

If he was scared, then I had every right to sweat terror.

Somehow, we lost her. At least, when my new friend finally slowed to a healthy run, Lilith was nowhere in sight. The guy dragged me into the skeleton of an alley, hurled aside the corpse of a Humvee, then dove into a hole beneath it, yanking me down into darkness.

We waited in the breathless umber for I don't know how long. At last, I heard the strike of a match, and in the small flame, saw a face I knew I should know, but couldn't quite place. He had broad, Mediterranean features, and deep-bronze skin that glistened orange in the match light. His hair was steel grey, but he hadn't a wrinkle on his face; couldn't have been more than thirty-five, if I had to guess.

"You," he said in a deep, husky voice. "You should not be here. Lilith only takes life."

"Begging your pardon—and thanks for the save—I take orders only from my commanding officers. And you aren't Colonel French."

"No," the man said. "I have failed my stewardship here." His eyes flicked to the side for a moment, and it seemed as though the matchlight was inside his eyes, instead of merely reflected. "But, perhaps, you can help me change that."

"And who, sir," I said, trying to let every ounce of dubiousness I felt bleed into my voice, "are you?"

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hundred years without aging. He may not be my commanding officer, but something told me maybe I should listen to this guy.

"I," he said at last, sitting down and picking up an old-time waterskin from the floor, "am Adam."

He held out the water and gestured for me to drink. "Welcome," he said, "to the suburbs of what was once Eden."

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